

GUEST COLUMN

By Milt Heflin, Chief of the Flight Director Office



On the afternoon of Feb. 1, 2003, I participated in a news conference describing the events of that morning in Mission Control as we lost the *Columbia* and her crew. I remember very little from the two hours that Space Shuttle Program Director Ron Dittmore and I spent answering questions. I was numb from shock.

I reflected on how this wonderful country of ours responds to crisis and how we always come together to support each other. In my opening remarks, I said: "This is a bad day...I'm glad I work and live in a country where...when we have a bad day, we go fix it."

What I have witnessed since that day reassures me that we will "go fix it."

At the two East Texas field sites I visited – Lufkin/Nacogdoches and Barksdale – I saw a relentless NASA/contractor workforce that stood side by side with local and national organizations – too many to name – along with Mr. and Ms. East Texas. The same spirit was evident at Carswell. All were not just determined but openly eager to be a part of helping us fix it. If people walked away from these locations without feeling good about their fellow human beings or without a lump in their throat or a tear in their eyes – they ain't human.

At home I have seen the NASA/contractor family rally around the Space Shuttle Program leadership of Ron Dittmore, Linda Ham, Ralph Roe and Dave Whittle to establish an in-depth investigation process as part of the program-mandated Mishap Response Team. Dave's work as Chairman of the Mishap Investigation Team, away from home in the field, has been heroic. The work of the NASA and contractor employees on the various investigation teams, including the JSC Emergency Operations Center volunteers that supported the initial collecting of information from the public, has been eye-watering! The *Columbia* Accident Investigation Board is benefiting from the rigor and impeccable integrity by which these teams have done their work – the very foundation that is being used to find out what happened and to build upon to fix it.

International Space Station Program Manager Bill Gerstenmaier's leadership has also been quite evident. He is out in front working with all program elements and our international partners on the very tough issues of maintaining a human presence on the ISS. Bill's upbeat, positive leadership exudes confidence, suggesting that we will overcome any obstacle on our road to recovery from this very tragic loss.

The crew on the ISS is very upbeat with a vigilant team on the ground ensuring their safety and well-being, knowing that the bar has been raised to keep it that way.

And what about our collective JSC family? I can't go anywhere onsite without seeing folks very focused on doing their jobs and doing them well. I can see and feel the determination by just exchanging glances, a handshake, a pat on the back or a hug. It is also quite evident that everybody wants to help in one way or another.

In my opinion, we're all helping. By the nature of our jobs we are supporting human spaceflight. Whether or not you are directly involved in the recovery or investigation, each of us is, and must be, directly accountable and responsible for what we do day in and day out.

I wish to leave you with the "Foundations of Mission Operations." By the way, I don't see these as being unique to my area of work. Rather, I see them as principles that can be applied to many work disciplines – especially now.

1. To instill within ourselves these qualities essential to professional excellence:

- ❖ **Discipline:** Being able to follow as well as to lead, knowing that we must master ourselves before we can master our task.
- ❖ **Competence:** There being no substitute for total preparation and complete dedication, for space will not tolerate the careless or indifferent.
- ❖ **Confidence:** Believing in ourselves as well as others, knowing that we must master fear and hesitation before we can succeed.
- ❖ **Responsibility:** Realizing that it cannot be shifted to others, for it belongs to each of us; we must answer for what we do or fail to do.
- ❖ **Toughness:** Taking a stand when we must; to try again, and again if it means following a more difficult path.
- ❖ **Teamwork:** Respecting and utilizing the abilities of others, realizing that we work toward a common goal, for success depends upon the efforts of all.

2. To always be aware that suddenly and unexpectedly we may find ourselves in a role where our performance has ultimate consequences.

3. To recognize that the greatest error is not to have tried and failed, but that in the trying we do not give it our best effort.

I'm confident that if we adhere to these principles, we can fix anything.

Center Director Message



MOVING FORWARD

It's April and we're still in the midst of the *Columbia* accident investigation with all of the inherent theories, rumors and second-guessing by the press. On face value one could think that we are spinning our wheels and going nowhere fast. As a matter of fact, however, we are moving forward.

The *Columbia* Accident Investigation Board is making progress in its quest of the reason for this tragedy. This is not an easy task. The collection of evidence is difficult and painstaking. The subsequent analysis is tedious and time consuming. However, utilizing your and our teammates' expertise, hard work and assistance, they are slowly but surely piecing the facts together and I am confident that they will find the cause. They are moving forward.

On March 16 and 17, the NASA Administrator conducted an off-site meeting with the NASA Leadership Council. The focus was on the future including briefings about the Integrated Financial Management Program, the new Education Outreach programs, the FY 2004 budget, Full Cost Accounting, the Integrated Space Transportation Plan and the Shuttle Return to Flight Initiative. NASA, under the steady hand of Sean O'Keefe, is moving forward.

On March 19 and 20, the Office of Space Flight conducted a summit on the service life extension of the shuttle. In attendance was the entire senior leadership of the Human Space Flight Enterprise including both government and industry members. Agreement was made on the necessary first steps to take in order to safely fly the shuttle past 2020. With Bill Readdy, Associate Administrator for Space Flight in the lead, Human Space Flight is moving forward.

Yes, there are many questions about what it will take to return to flight. Yes, there is still much soul searching about what you or I might have done to prevent the accident. Yes, there is still much grief to endure. Yes, the valiant crew of *Columbia* will always be on our minds. However, to properly honor them and to best serve our Agency and our Nation we must move forward. I know you will give your best as we do.

Beak sends.....

FROM THE DESK OF LT. GEN. JEFFERSON D. HOWELL JR.

People want to know; do you want to tell them?

Johnson Space Center finds itself in a unique position in the wake of our recent tragedy. The public is eager for news from the Center: news about the accident and the investigation, but also about the International Space Station, the Educator Astronaut program and our other projects. Students want to learn about human spaceflight. Taxpayers want to know how NASA benefits them through research and spinoffs.

People want to know; do you want to tell them?

JSC civil servant employees are encouraged to join the Speaker's Bureau, an official NASA organization. Through the Speaker's Bureau, employees become available as speakers to schools, organizational meetings and other groups. If you are interested in joining JSC's chapter of the Speaker's Bureau, please contact Kim Roehm at x34754.

Also, watch for more information about the Speaker's Bureau in the upcoming months, including opportunities for contractor employees to get involved. Help tell JSC's story!